MARVEL

13

LGY#256

PERCY
SMITH
JUNIOR
VALENZA

GHOST RIDER

When innocent blood is spilled, a ***Spirit of Vengeance*** is born, and **JOHNNY BLAZE** finds himself transformed!

Marvel Comics *presents*. . .

GHOST RIDER

"My Brother's Keeper"

BENJAMIN PERCY
writer

CORY SMITH
penciler

OREN JUNIOR
inker

BRYAN VALENZA
colorist

VC's TRAVIS LANHAM
letterer

BJÖRN BARENDS *cover artist*

ROD REIS; MICHAEL WALSH
variant cover artists

ANTHONY GAMBINO *designer*
KAT GREGOROWICZ *assistant editor*
DARREN SHAN *editor*
C.B. CEBULSKI *editor in chief*

PREVIOUSLY...

The Ghost Rider's old foe, Blackheart, had secretly influenced the corners of power in the U.S. and used his dark force to sow chaos throughout the country. Although Johnny and the Rider sent Blackheart back to Hell, his influence can still be felt across the country. Johnny and exiled F.B.I. agent Talia Warroad are traveling together, stamping out what's left of Blackheart's dark conspiracy.

Johnny and Talia arrived in Savannah, Georgia, where a mysterious surge of demonic energy had taken over the city! They soon discovered the carnage was brought on by another Ghost Rider--Johnny's brother, Danny Ketch!

SIX MONTHS AGO.
SOMEWHERE IN NEW JERSEY.

THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE. YOU'LL NEVER MAKE IT.

LONELY NIGHTS

BAR

OR AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT THE KID SAID TO ME.

I WAS MAYBE 7, POSSIBLY 10. WHO KNOWS? I HAD A BMX BACK THEN. AND I HAD SET UP THIS JUMP.

THE JUMP WAS ON THE ROOF OF A FOUR-STORY APARTMENT BUILDING. SO ROUGHLY FORTY-FIVE, FIFTY FEET IN THE AIR, YEAH?

THE IDEA WAS, I WOULD CLEAR THE ALLEY, LAND ON THE NEIGHBORING ROOF.

PRETTY STUPID MAYBE, BUT THERE WAS TEN BUCKS ON THE LINE, AND TEN BUCKS IS A MILLION DOLLARS TO A KID.

JUST A MINUTE AGO, YOU TOLD ME THIS WAS AN IMPOSSIBLE SHOT.

BUT YOU'VE NEVER SEEN ME JUMP.

I CLEARED THAT ALLEY. FLEW LIKE A #$%& EAGLE.

I CRASHED HARD. BROKE MY RIGHT LEG AND LEFT WRIST WHEN I LANDED.

BUT I MADE IT.

AND I COLLECTED THAT SWEET, GREEN MONEY.

YOU HUSTLED ME, PUNK!

PLEASE, DUDE. THERE'S NO NEED TO HAVE A TEMPER TANTRUM. IT'S UNBECOMING.

YOU COULD HAVE JUST SAID DOUBLE OR NOTHING.

NGHHH!

ZZT ZZT

DANIEL KETCH?

UM, YEAH?

MAY I BUY YOU A DRINK?

ZZT

I DON'T KNOW WHO LOOKED MORE SURPRISED...

...ME AFTER YOU TASED THAT DUDE OR THE BARTENDER WHEN YOU ORDERED A CABERNET.

IT TOOK SOME LOOKING, BUT HE FINALLY FOUND A BOTTLE IN THE BACK.

JUST LIKE IT TOOK SOME LOOKING, BUT I FINALLY FOUND *YOU.*

YEAH. ABOUT THAT.

IS THIS ABOUT ME, OR IS THIS ABOUT...?

IT'S ABOUT... *BOTH* OF YOU.

YOU'VE GOT GOOD *SPIRIT,* AS THEY SAY.

WHAT DO YOU WANT, *DR. DIYU?*

WELL...I WAS GOING TO SAY I HAVE A PROPOSITION FOR YOU.

BUT HOW ABOUT I PUT IT THIS WAY INSTEAD?

I HAVE A *WAGER.*

NOW YOU'RE TALKING.

CLINK

PRESENT DAY.
MYRTLE BEACH, SOUTH CAROLINA.

SO, IT WAS SOME KIND OF SEX CLUB?

RED PARADISE

SEX WAS PART OF IT. SO WERE DRUGS.

SO WAS BLOOD AND DEMONIC WORSHIP.

THEY HAD HIRED OUT A DJ NAMED *THE RAM.*

HE WAS KNOWN FOR PRODUCING BEATS HE CALLED *THE PULSE OF HELL.* THEY GAVE PEOPLE VISIONS. THEY INVITED *POSSESSION.*

IF THEY HAD LIVED, THEY WOULD HAVE LEFT A LEGION.

TALIA... $#%&...

HOW MANY DIED IN THE FIRE?

HUNDREDS, JOHNNY.

I CAN STILL SMELL THEIR SWEAT...

"I CAN STILL FEEL THE PULSE OF THE MUSIC..."

THERE WAS A SCREECH OF FEEDBACK. THEN EVERYTHING WENT SILENT. AND DARK.

AND THE SCREAMS TOOK OVER.

"THE FIRE SWEPT THROUGH THE BUILDING IN SECONDS."

ONLY ONE PERSON SURVIVED. SHE HAS THIRD-DEGREE BURNS ACROSS HER ENTIRE BODY AND ISN'T EXPECTED TO MAKE IT.

SHOW ME.

"THE EXIT WAS BLOCKED BY... SOMETHING... *SOMEONE.*

EXIT

"A MAN WHO WAS NOT A MAN.

"A MAN WHOSE FACE AND HANDS WERE MADE OF FLAME."

THAT'S NOT...

HE WOULDN'T *DO* THAT...

DANNY, WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO YOU?

OH, YUM. I WAS WONDERING WHAT WAS FOR DINNER.

SIX MONTHS AGO.
INFERNAL LABS.

DEMON CHARCUTERIE.

YOU ARE FUNNY, DANIEL.

IT'S *DANNY.*

I IMAGINE YOU HAVE TO MAINTAIN A SENSE OF HUMOR TO... ENDURE THE DARKER ELEMENTS OF YOUR LIFE.

SO, HOW DOES THIS WHOLE THING WORK?

INFERNAL LABS IS A PRIVATE RESEARCH GROUP DEVOTED TO STUDYING THE BIOLOGY, GEOLOGY, CHEMISTRY AND PHYSICS OF *HELL.*

THAT I CAN SEE. IT'S THE "WHY" I'M TRYING TO WRAP MY BRAIN AROUND.

WHY DO PALEONTOLOGISTS DIG THROUGH SOIL AND TIME? WHY DO OCEANOGRAPHERS SINK THEIR VESSELS INTO TRENCHES?

WOULDN'T YOU AGREE IT'S IMPORTANT TO KNOW THE WORLD ABOVE *AND* BELOW?

DEPENDS.

DR. DIYU, YOU DIDN'T MENTION THE PSYCHOLOGY OF HELL AS PART OF YOUR STUDIES. I HAPPEN TO HAVE DONE A LITTLE RESEARCH.

ZEEP

AND MONEY AND POWER--THEY TEND TO HAVE *CORRUPTING* EFFECTS ON FOLKS.

I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU'RE TRYING TO PATENT ANYTHING IN HERE? SELL SOME WEAPONS? HELLFIRE FLAMETHROWER MAYBE?

I HAVE NO INTEREST IN MONEY OUTSIDE OF SUPPORTING MY WORK.

MY RESEARCH IS...MORE *PERSONAL.*

OH $#%@. WHAT HAPP--?

I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND, DANIEL, BUT I FEEL LIKE I'M ONLY HAVING *HALF* A CONVERSATION.

ZEEP

THE #%$& IS THIS?

SHOW ME WHAT HE CAN DO. I'M HAPPY TO PAY YOU FOR YOUR TIME.

I WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK WITH THE *SPIRIT,* PLEASE.

YEAH? THIS ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE TEN-DOLLAR BETS THAT LEAVES ME BUSTED-UP?

REEOOOOR!

YOU SAID I'M FUNNY, DR. DIYU.

BUT JUST SO YOU KNOW...

...THE OTHER GUY DOESN'T HAVE MUCH OF A SENSE OF HUMOR.

PRESENT DAY.

YES, WE KNOW VISITING HOURS ARE OVER. AND, NO, WE'RE NOT FAMILY.

GEORGETOWN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

BUT THAT'S OKAY. YOU'RE HAPPY TO HELP US.

HERE ARE YOUR PASSES. YOU'RE LOOKING FOR MINDY BRENNER. SECOND FLOOR. BURN UNIT. ROOM THREE.

DON'T EVER DO THAT MIND-CONTROL CRAP TO ME.

THEN AGREE TO ALWAYS DO THINGS MY WAY.

OH @#$%.

HEY THERE, MINDY? I'M SURE YOU'RE FEELING ABSOLUTELY #$%@& MISERABLE RIGHT NOW. BUT WE NEED YOUR HELP.

TELL US MORE ABOUT THE KILLER. THE MAN WITH THE *BURNING SKULL.*

NOT... -KOFF-... COPS...?

NO. WE'RE DEFINITELY NOT COPS.

DID HE SAY ANYTHING? DID YOU SEE ANYTHING THAT MIGHT HELP US FIND HIM?

I...DIDN'T WANT...TO GO... -KOFF-

I...-KOFF-... DON'T WANT... TO GO... -KOFF-

...TO HELL.

BEEP BEEP

-KOFF-... BOYFRIEND... -KOFF KOFF- MADE ME...

IT'S OKAY.

BEEP BEEP

GOING... -KOFF-... TO HELL...

WHAT IF I TOLD YOU I COULD CLEANSE YOU OF SIN? IF YOU HELPED US?

IS IT? THIS CLUB WASN'T FULL OF INNOCENTS. HER BOYFRIEND--A GUY WHO WENT BY THE NAME OF SULFUR--APPARENTLY HAD A BLOOD ALTAR IN HIS BASEMENT.

HE'S THE ONE WHO DID THE KILLING, BUT SHE STOOD BY HIM.

...PRIEST...?

NOT A COP AND NOT A PRIEST.

I'M SOMETHING BETTER AND SOMETHING WORSE.

SMOKE... -KOFF-... THROAT...

YOU WANT WATER?

PAPE-- -KOFF KOFF-... PAPER.

NEED A PEN.

-KOFF KOFF KOFF-

I... -KOFF-

DON'T WANT... -KOFF KOFF-...TO SEE THAT DEMON AGAIN.

DON'T WANT... -KOFF KOFF KOFF-... TO GO TO HELL.

IF I'M GOING TO HELP HER, I'LL NEED THE RIDER. CAN YOU GIVE ME A KICK-START?

NO NEED.

BEEEEEEEEEEP

IT'S TOO LATE FOR HER.

IF THIS IS ACCURATE, HIS GEAR LOOKS TECH-MODIFIED.

BEFORE THE MUSIC IN THE CLUB WENT QUIET... BEFORE THE ATTACK... THE LIGHTS SHUT OFF AND THERE WAS A FEEDBACK SCREECH.

LOOKING AT THIS HELMET...WHAT IF THOSE AREN'T HORNS?

WHAT IF THEY'RE *ANTENNAS?*

SIX MONTHS AGO.
INFERNAL LABS.

DANIEL?

DANIEL, WAKE UP.

UGH. WAS IT AS GOOD FOR YOU AS IT WAS FOR ME?

YOU DID VERY WELL. IT WAS A FASCINATING DEMONSTRATION. THANK YOU.

HOW DO YOU FEEL?

LIKE @#$% ON HOT PAVEMENT.

IS THAT NORMAL? AFTER YOU TRANSFORM?

HELLFIRE HANGOVER? YEAH. AIN'T EASY ON THE BODY OR SOUL.

LET'S REST IN MY OFFICE. CAN I OFFER YOU SOMETHING? SOME COFFEE? A SODA?

OR SOMETHING STRONGER?

YOU'RE LIVING WITH A CURSE.

BUT WHAT IF YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO?

SORRY-- WHAT?

TAKE A LOOK AT THIS.

WHAT AM I LOOKING AT?

A DAMAGE REPORT.

ALL THE DAMAGE YOU'VE DONE OVER THE YEARS TO ROADWAYS, BUILDINGS AND VEHICLES--IT AMOUNTS TO MILLIONS. AND THAT DOESN'T EVEN ACCOUNT FOR THE PEOPLE--

I'VE SAVED SOME LIVES ALONG THE WAY TOO, YOU KNOW.

LIVES HAVE BEEN SAVED, YES, BUT LIVES HAVE BEEN *LOST.*

YOU SCARED A WOMAN NAMED KATELYN GREGOR INTO HAVING A HEART ATTACK. A MAN NAMED BRUCE BOYLE CAREENED OFF THE ROAD AND HIT A TREE WHEN YOU BLAZED BY HIM. A CHILD--

THAT'S BULL!

I ASSURE YOU IT IS TRUE.

AND THEN THERE'S THE TOLL ON YOU. PHYSICALLY. MENTALLY.

I DID YOUR STUPID LITTLE EXPERIMENT. YOU SAID THERE WAS SOMETHING IN IT FOR ME?

BECAUSE I'M READY TO COLLECT AND GET THE #$%& OUT OF HERE.

WHAT IF I TOLD YOU... YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIVE WITH A MONSTER ON YOUR BACK?

I THINK I CAN HELP YOU.

BET THAT MEANS YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING TO GAIN.

NATURALLY.

WHO'S THIS, ANYWAY?

THAT'S A PHOTO OF ME AND MY BROTHER, DELUN. WHEN HE WAS 14, HE WAS POSSESSED BY A *DEMON.*

MY PARENTS HIRED AN EXORCIST, BUT DURING THE RITUAL, HE THREW HIMSELF OUT OF A WINDOW AND BROKE HIS NECK.

THAT HOW YOU GOT THAT SCAR YOU SHOWED ME?

THERE ARE THE SCARS WE CARRY ON THE OUTSIDE, AND THERE ARE THE SCARS WE CARRY ON THE INSIDE.

HIS MEMORY HELPS REMIND ME WHY I'M DOING WHAT I'M DOING.

AND WHAT IS THAT, EXACTLY?

THE RESEARCH I'M DOING HERE REQUIRES FUNDING FROM PRIVATE DONORS AND GOVERNMENT GRANTS.

I'VE RECEIVED A SOFT PROMISE OF TWENTY MILLION IF I CAN SUCCESSFULLY ENLIST YOU AS A SUBJECT.

YOU'RE OFFERING ME MONEY?

NO. I'M OFFERING YOU FREEDOM.

AT THE END OF THIS TRIAL, I WILL SEPARATE YOU FROM THE SPIR--

STOP!

HE MIGHT HEAR...

...AND YOU *DON'T* WANT TO MAKE HIM ANGRY.

WE DON'T HAVE TO TALK ABOUT IT.

IN FACT... YOU CAN READ ABOUT IT RIGHT HERE.

INFERNAL LAB

INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR AGREEMENT

I'LL JUST NEED A SIGNATURE.

AND THEN YOU CAN START EARNING YOUR LIFE BACK.

PRESENT DAY.

THE AIR IS FULL OF GHOSTS.

DIGI COM DATA CENTER

RADIO AND TV AND CELL SIGNALS.

WHITE NOISE, SOME PEOPLE CALL IT.

SECURITY

BUT I GUESS YOU COULD SAY THERE'S BLACK NOISE TOO.

THE WHISPERING OF THE DEAD. THE HOWLING OF DEMONS.

IT'S INFORMATION, JUST LIKE ANYTHING ELSE. JUST RELAYED ON A DARKER FREQUENCY.

IF THAT HELMET IS SOME SORT OF TRANSMITTER, IT WOULD HAVE PINGED THE TOWER A FEW BLOCKS AWAY FROM THE CLUB.

AND EVERYTHING THAT HITS A TOWER FLOWS THROUGH THESE DATA CABINETS.

HOLD ON. I THINK I'VE GOT--

@#$%.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH HER?

SHE HEARD SOMETHING SHE WASN'T READY FOR.

YOU SURE YOU SHOULD DO THAT?

SHHH.

BLARRG!

WHAT DID YOU HEAR?

I CAN'T... -GASP- I DON'T HAVE WORDS FOR IT.

LET'S SEE WHAT KIND OF HEAVY METAL THEY'RE PLAYING.

HARRRRR!

I HEARD A DARK SONG.

CRUSSH

WHAT-- WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

I HEARD THE CALL OF THE BROTHER.

AND I OFFER AN ANSWER.

ALL RIGHT, DANIEL. WE'RE GOING TO BEGIN ANOTHER--

OZZZZT

WHAT HAPPENED?

I THINK WE'VE BEEN FOUND.

I THINK WE'VE BEEN WARNED.

AND I THINK WE SHOULD PREPARE FOR VISITORS.

TO BE CONTINUED!

NEXT ISSUE

DARK FREQUENCIES

Johnny Blaze and Talia Warroad learn that Infernal Labs, a research group devoted to weaponizing the instruments of Hell, have enlisted Danny Ketch as a mindless soldier. But in order to save him, they need to battle him, before he destroys himself and others!

© 2023 MARVEL. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental.

ZONE